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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000218

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: THE HZDS SHUFFLE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Scott N. Thayer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Viliam Veteska unexpectedly gave up his post as parliamentary caucus leader of the opposition People's Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LS-HZDS). He will be temporarily replaced by Tibor Cabaj. Veteska will, however, maintain the post of Deputy Speaker of Parliament. Although he gave health problems as the reason, some politicians have suggested he gave up the post due to conflicts with party boss Vladimir Meciar. Meciar may be ousting MPs who favor collaboration with Robert Fico's Smer. Smer MP Robert Kalinak told poloff that Veteska could leave HZDS and join Smer. (Comment: Veteska is unlikely to join Smer, although he had lobbied within HZDS for closer cooperation with Smer. We have heard from other party insiders that Veteska would like to replace Meciar as leader of HZDS after the 2006 parliamentary elections. End comment.)

12. (C) Meciar may be positioning HZDS to join a ruling coalition after the 2006 parliamentary elections by moving LS-HZDS towards Mikulas Dzurinda's SDKU (and Pavol Rusko's ANO). However, Meciar's tactic could weaken his party's voter appeal, since Meciar's loyalists are not angry with Fico, but with Dzurinda. Tibor Mikus may be the next MP to move out of national politics by accepting Meciar's offer to be the HZDS candidate in the Trnava regional elections (November 2005). Jan Jasovsky left the HZDS MPs club after Meciar nominated and MPs elected Jasovsky to head the Supreme Audit Office. Veteska, Mikus, and Jasovsky make up the "quasi" dissident group in HZDS that Meciar wants to remove as potential future rivals well before the 2006 elections.

13. (C) MP Milan Urbani, a HZDS Vice-Chair who is very close to Meciar, told poloff March 8 that Veteska was unable to manage the legislative agenda and the behavior of all 26 HZDS MPs. He said Veteska has back problems and needs physical therapy. Cabaj has been an MP for three terms, is familiar with the rules of parliament, and will be able to exercise better administrative control as party whip. Urbani confirmed that Veteska and Mikus had wanted closer cooperation between HZDS and Smer, but said this particular "internal discussion" had been resolved. Urbani said Fico never keeps his word, so Meciar does not consider him a reliable political partner.

14. (C) Comment: The history of HZDS is one of purges and defections as Meciar maintains firm control of the party. It is too early to tell if these recent moves will result in another purge or defection, but we will continue to watch HZDS internal shuffling as Meciar positions the party for regional elections in November and parliamentary elections next year.

THAYER

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